

PROGRESSING NATIONAL SDG IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2023

III. IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA IN PARTNERSHIP

Annex: Use of the Secretary General's 'voluntary common reporting guidelines'



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Introduction

This section focuses on the application of the United Nations Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, by examining how the countries presenting VNR reports in 2023 have made use of and complied with the guidelines.

1. Use of the voluntary common reporting guidelines

- **Overall guideline compliance:** The 2023 VNR reports demonstrate overall improvements in complying with the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines compared to 2022, continuing the positive trend seen for the 2019–2022 period. Notably, most key components outlined in the guidelines are addressed by a majority of countries. These improvements in structure are likely due to the UN's publication of the VNR handbook in 2022 and countries' growing experience in SDG reporting. However, upon closer examination, it's evident that many components are only partially complied with, and full compliance remains a challenge for many countries.
- **Declines in reporting:** While most countries delivering VNRs in 2023 generally adhere to the Secretary-General's reporting guidelines (at least at a basic level), there have been some isolated regressions concerning certain components. This is the case of three (3) components out of 15: Statement by Head of State (82%, from 88% in 2022), Leaving no one behind (85%, from 93% in 2022), and Systemic issues (85%, from 90% in 2022). For the Leaving no one behind component, around 35% of VNR countries have dedicated sections on this principle – although scope and content varies greatly. Most countries do identify main categories of the population being left behind and their challenges, but details on specific policies or overarching approaches to mainstream the LNOB principle in public policies are rather inconsistent.
- **Increases in reporting:** It is worth noting that 8 components reached a topline figure of 100% (Introduction; Methodology; Ensuring Ownership; Incorporation into national frameworks; Institutional Mechanisms; Goals and Targets; New and emerging challenges; and Conclusion and next steps). That said, these basic compliance figures need to be nuanced, as within these components, many countries only partially comply with the guidelines. The component that boasts the highest level of full compliance is Methodology (74%), while Institutional Mechanisms (56%), Ensuring ownership (54%) and New and emerging challenges (51%) are the components that show the lowest level of full compliance.
- **Ensuring Ownership and Institutional Mechanisms:** Although both components are addressed to some extent in 100% of the 2023 VNRs, full compliance is lower as mentioned

above. Regarding the Ensuring ownership component, while most countries mention stakeholder involvement in VNR formulation and partnerships around SDG delivery and awareness-raising, fewer elaborate on stakeholder engagement in policy coordination and monitoring. The Institutional Mechanisms component shares this fragmented approach, with institutional adaptations or innovations for SDG governance mentioned by most countries, although often lacking detail. However, only 38% of reporting countries in 2023 addressed non-state actor engagement in institutional mechanisms, a lower proportion to 2021 and 2022. This trend, added to the proportion of countries that admit having established only government-centered mechanisms or are unclear about the nature of their arrangements (57%), suggests a limited expansion of public deliberation processes within coordination, policy formulation, resource allocation, and monitoring efforts.

- **Integration of the Three Dimensions of Sustainable Development:** another one of the components that is less complied with upon closer examination. Although 97% of VNR countries seem to comply at a basic level (mostly through superficial mentions), only 29% of countries actually addressed Integration in a more comprehensive way, through dedicated sections explaining how SDG implementation has brought more reflexive and sophisticated policy making processes. In most countries, this is done primarily through policy integration at the level of National Development Plans or Strategies. The translation of integrated planning into more cross-sectoral and multi-level policy making and implementation efforts, as well as into more collaborative and data-driven approaches is less clear.

2. Trends in reporting against the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines over 2022–2023

Apart from assessing the percentage of countries including the guidelines' components into their VNR reports, more information was drawn in terms of countries' overall compliance with the guidelines. The following table provides an overview of trends, outlining countries that:

- have fully met the guidelines for a component, indicated in green;
- partially met the guidelines by referring to the component but not addressing all the different elements specified in the guidelines, indicated in yellow; or
- did not include the component at all, indicated in red.

	Statement by HoS	Highlights	Introduction	Methodology for Review	Ensuring ownership	Incorporation into National Frameworks	Integration of three dimensions	Leaving no one behind	Institutional Mechanisms	Structural Issues	Goals and Targets	New and emerging Challenges	Means of Implementation	Conclusions	Annexes
Barbados															
Bahrain															
Belgium															
Bosnia															
Brunei															
Burkina Faso															
Cambodia															
Canada															
Chile															
Croatia															
CAR															
Comoros															
DRC															
Fiji															
France															
Guyana															
Iceland															
Ireland															
Kuwait															
Liechtenstein															
Lithuania															
Maldives															
Mongolia															
Poland															
Portugal															
Romania															
Rwanda															
St.Kitts & Nevis															
Saudi Arabia															
Slovakia															
Singapore															
Tajikistan															
Tanzania															
Timor Leste															
Turkmenistan															
Uzbekistan															
Vietnam															
Zambia															
EU															
Direction of change over previous year (2021–2022)	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Percentage of countries including component in 2023	82%	85%	100%	100%	100%	100%	97%	85%	100%	85%	100%	100%	95%	100%	87%
Percentage of countries including component in 2022	88%	82%	93%	95%	88%	98%	86%	93%	90%	90%	98%	90%	86%	91%	77%
Percentage of countries including component in 2021	79%	86%	86%	88%	74%	93%	74%	93%	93%	76%	98%	88%*	98%	88%	71%
Percentage of countries including component in 2020	77%	87%	92%	96%	85%	96%	79%	87%	94%	87%	96%	-	96%	94%	72%
Percentage of countries including component in 2019	83%	81%	96%	83%	94%	98%	85%	81%	98%	53%	94%	-	91%	(**)	72%
Percentage of countries including component in 2018	83%	72%	96%	93%	80%	96%	72%	63%	96%	67%	91%	-	76%	(***)	61%

(*) Component added in the VNR Handbook 2021 (**) Conclusion 77%, Next steps 79% (***) Conclusion 74%, Next steps 80%